

United States Senator Chuck Grassley

Iowa

<http://grassley.senate.gov>
Grassley_Press@grassley.senate.gov



Beth Pellett Levine, 202/224-6197
Lucas Bolar, 202/224-0484

Prepared Statement of Senator Chuck Grassley
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Oversight Hearing with Attorney General Alberto Gonzales
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Mr. Attorney General, I've reserved judgment on what has happened with the firing of certain U.S. Attorneys. I have to admit that it's been difficult. The inconsistent information has unfortunately made what may be a perfectly explainable situation into something that many have already concluded was misconduct. Your testimony today is extremely important for me as I sort through all the facts and draw my own conclusions. I hope that your testimony sets the story straight and clears the waters.

No one seriously takes issue with the statement that U.S. Attorneys serve at the pleasure of the President. The President has the authority to hire or fire a U.S. Attorney, for example, if he felt an individual wasn't pursuing his priorities aggressively enough, or if he wanted to give another candidate an opportunity to serve. That's not against the law. However, it would be improper for a President to fire a U.S. Attorney for retaliatory reasons, or to impede or obstruct a particular prosecution for unjust political and partisan gain. We don't want to see the independence and integrity of our U.S. Attorneys compromised to the point where they aren't serving their districts in the proper interest of justice.

I don't know if the U.S. Attorneys who were asked to resign were fired because they were pursuing or not pursuing investigations or prosecutions based on political motivations. But I do know that once the Administration started to make representations to Congress and the American people about how and why the firings came about, those representations had to be accurate and complete. Yet documents produced by the Justice Department are inconsistent with public statements and congressional testimony of Justice Department officials, and we just don't have a straight story on what transpired or whether the motivations for what happened were pure.

You're well aware that I'm very serious about conducting congressional oversight. Oversight is a core responsibility of my job as a member of the Senate. I'm "equal opportunity" when it comes to oversight – over the years, I've looked into both Republican and Democrat Administrations with the same vigor – so I know how important it is to get complete and truthful information. And it helps when you get some cooperation in getting the facts. But I feel that on many occasions, this Administration has made a concerted effort to thwart my oversight efforts. Just last week, the Justice Department tried to block a convicted felon from testifying before the Finance Committee. I'm glad to say that the federal courts disagreed with you and, in the end,

we got our witness to provide the Committee with extremely helpful information on identity theft and tax returns.

I know that the Justice Department has produced documents to the Judiciary Committee in response to our requests for information on the U.S. Attorney firings. But your representations to Congress need to be accurate and complete, or else our oversight activities won't be able to get to the bottom of anything. We shouldn't be getting conflicting statements from the Attorney General, or his top staff. We shouldn't be getting conflicting statements at all. The story needs to be consistent and complete, and it must be the truth. We, and the American people, should expect nothing less from our top law enforcement officers.

So Attorney General Gonzales, I hope that you'll be completely forthcoming and candid with the Committee. There should be no reluctance on your part to get all the facts out on the table.

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